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ABSTRACT

Trends in the enrollment of adult students in higher education are examined, and some inappropriate policies and procedures presently in effect at colleges and universities that are obstacles to adult learners are discussed. The demographic picture of the adult student population is presented as are projections for the general population and potential student market. Increases in the adult population are charted, and a graph of the age distribution until the year 2000 is included. Ways in which the student services/student affairs area may adapt its policies, programs, and procedures to better serve adult learners and to avoid creating obstacles to continued adult student enrollment are considered. (SW)

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OLD MYTHS AND NEW REALITIES: RESTRUCTURING STUDENT SERVICES FOR ADULT LEARNERS

The recruitment and retention of adult students is a matter of considerable importance for the majority of our colleges and universities. One sector of higher education which has a significant impact on those activities is the student services/student affairs area. Yet on many campuses those services are oriented to serving the traditional 18 to 21 year old student. Policies, procedures, and programs are quite simply structured to serve young people. In many instances, those services are not only not helpful to adult students but are, in fact, offensive and in conflict with their needs and interests. This situation creates considerable institutional obstacles for adult students. The purpose of our program today, is to suggest ways in which the student services/student affairs area may adapt its policies, programs and procedures to better serve adult learners or at the very least, avoid creating obstacles to continued adult student enrollment.

Allow me to present a few examples of current practices within the student services sector that could be termed inappropriate for the adult student:

1. Institutional correspondence addressed to "Dear Parent".
2. Student government geared to "adolescent social programming".
3. Counseling centers oriented to the developmental needs of 18 to 21 year olds.
4. Placement centers that focus on entry level positions.
5. Student activities or student center programs that emphasize daytime activities on weekdays.
6. Admissions applications that require letters from high school teachers.

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

7. Cafeteria menus that feature high caloric adolescent foods.
8. Orientation programs that focus on adapting to college life now that you're away from home and making your own decisions for the first time.
9. Class schedules and activity programs developed for students who have flexible schedules and few other commitments.
10. Closing of student services officer at 5:00 p.m. or staffing them with less than full-time professionals in the evening.
11. Scheduling of a major concert on an event when adult students need the parking space to attend class.
12. Structuring academic schedules to allow student organizations to meet at midday on weekdays.
13. Community building or social interaction programs that have as a major component alcohol consumption or loud music (the Freshman Beer Blast).
14. Use of student athletic fees primarily to fund contact, youth oriented, intercollegiate, team sports.

Regrettably this list of inappropriate practices could be continued and I'm sure that each of you could add, at least one such practice to the list. However, the point I wish to make is that student services has a considerable impact on the recruitment and retention of adult students. Particularly in terms of the institutional philosophy which is presented through those services. How we structure student services policies, procedures, and programs provides a clear indication to the adult student of the institution's willingness to accommodate their needs and interests and, quite simply, whether or not they are an important and integral part of the student body. Even more to the point, it is an indication of whether or not they are welcome and wanted on campus.

The major problem in adapting student services to adult students is, I believe, the continuing belief in several old myths regarding the student population in general and adult students in particular. Among these are:

1. That despite all the talk about adult learners, Freshmen are still basically the same.
2. There may be an increase in adult students but their numbers are not significant.
3. Adult students mostly enroll as part-time students and that group doesn't really have a substantial impact on any campus.
4. Adult students don't need and aren't really interested in student services or activities programs.

The realities of the situation are in fact that:

1. In 1977, 21% of the students graduating from high school delayed college entry by 1 to 3 years and 25% by 4 or more years. This change indicates a different Freshman with needs for different kinds of services for these older students.
2. In 1978 at least one-third of all students enrolled in higher education were over 25 years of age and at least 50% were age 22 or above and of the undergraduates 34% were 22 years of age or older.
3. By the fall of 1977, 31% of all undergraduates attended part-time. Of the total enrollment in higher education, 40% attended part-time.
4. Adults have indicated needs for certain services and when provided with the appropriate opportunities have become involved in structured activities.

I submit to you that the demographic realities of the present college student population (which I will elaborate on later in the program) and the projections for the remainder of this century require a reconceptualization and a restructuring of student services on our campuses as many of the premises on which those services were based are no longer viable. We need to incorporate into those services the concepts:

1. That adult learners have legitimate needs for those services.
2. That their needs are different from traditional 18-21 year old students in both content and method of delivery.

My colleagues will now present some of the possible courses of action for accomplishing this change.

by

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Table I

OLDER AGE GROUPS PERCENT OF

COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY ENROLLMENT

Year	Age 22-24	Age 25-29	Age 30-34	Age 35 & Over	Total 25 & Over	Total 22 & Over
1972	16.1	13.5	5.8	8.6	27.9	44.0
1973	16.3	14.3	6.1	8.8	29.2	45.5
1974	15.5	15.0	7.3	10.4	32.7	48.2
1975	15.4	14.9	7.8	10.9	33.6	49.0
1976	16.6	15.1	7.2	10.7	33.0	49.6
1977	15.6	15.7	8.6	11.5	35.8	51.4
1978	16.1	14.5	8.5	11.7	34.7	50.8

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 335, April 1979

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Table II

Percent Change in College Enrollment
By Age Groups, 1970 to 1978

	Male	Female
14 to 17 years old	-18.5	+29.2
18 and 19 years old	+3.3	+20.8
20 and 21 years old	+11.0	+41.6
22 to 24 years old	+14.0	+70.4
25 to 29 years old	+34.8	+173.3
30 to 34 years old	+85.2	+209.1

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 336, April, 1979.

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Table III

Projections of U.S. Population by Age
Percent Change in Age Cohorts

	1980 - 85	1985 - 90	Total Change
5 to 13	-8.4	+3.2	-5.2
14 to 17	-8.7	-11.3	-20.0
18 to 24	-5.5	-9.7	-15.2
25 to 34	+10.2	+3.1	+13.3
35 to 44	+22.0	+16.6	+38.6
45 to 54	-1.1	+12.7	+11.6
55 to 64	+2.5	-4.4	-1.9
65 & over	+9.5	+9.2	+18.7

Source: U. S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-25, No. 704, "Projections of the Population of the United States: 1977 to 2050."

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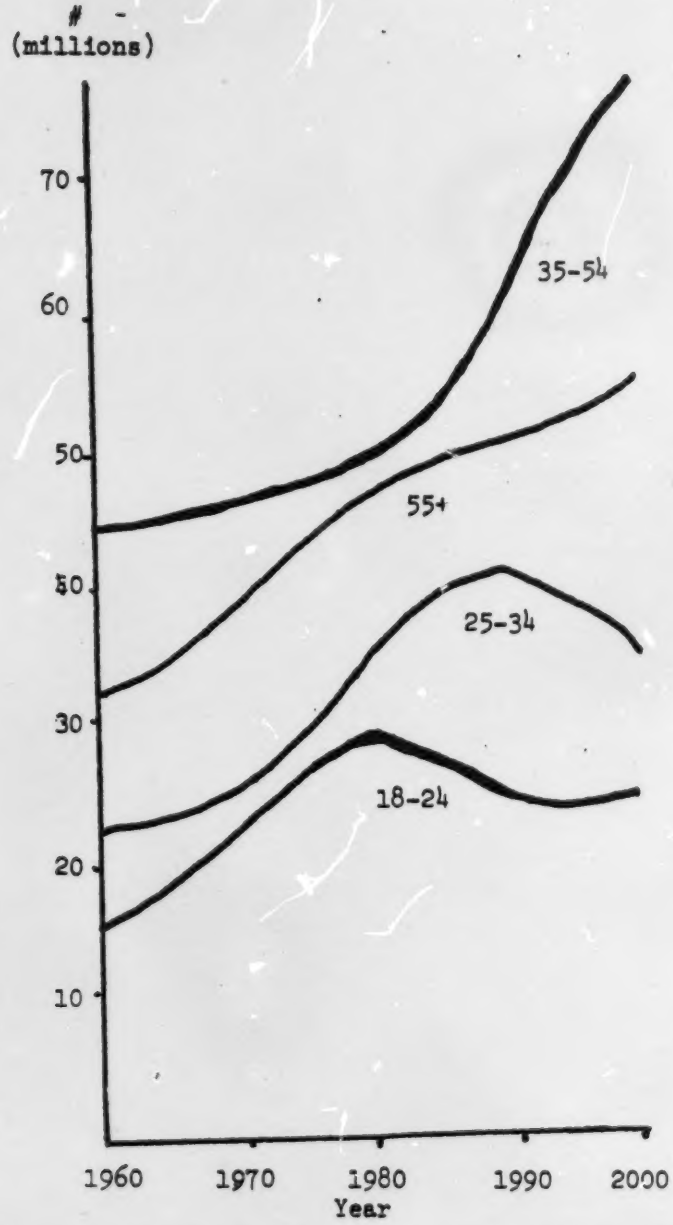
Graph I

U.S. Population: Age Distribution: 1960-2000*

Projected (Series II)



*Projections of the Population of the United States 1977 to 2050.

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